

John Isbister



A principal in a community school in rural Manitoba. He believes in including children with all needs in regular classrooms. He is modest about what he and his teachers do day-to-day to make inclusion a reality. Read his comments on what it takes to make it work.

See below to read the interview

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Short Bio:

This is my 29th year as an educator and my 10th as an administrator. The majority of my career has been with Sunrise School District and its previous incarnations. I've had a number of students with challenges in my classes over the years and I have always felt that the benefits of including them have been extensive for all members of the class.

- John Isbister

The Questions:

- 1. What makes your school “inclusive”?** *We believe that all students have the capacity to learn and what better place to do that than in the classroom. We have a staff that is committed to students. Programming for students with exceptional needs is coordinated through our Special Needs and Resource Department. It is also further supported by our Divisional Specialist. All our students belong in the classroom and the programming supports their success in the classroom environment.*
- 2. What do you do as the **PRINCIPAL** to make inclusion work in your school?***My staff share the belief that children need to be in class no matter what their individual needs may be. That being said, the Teacher and Educational Assistants have to be educated on an ongoing basis to have the tools necessary to help those children be successful. It's my role to make sure that what they need as a staff is provided in a timely manner. Planning ahead with the Special Needs/ Resource Teacher and preparing for the following year is essential for things to run smoothly.*
- 3. Why is it important to you that your school is inclusive?** *Children all have their gifts and it's important that they get to be shared in an accepting environment. The reality is that we are all different in many ways as well as being very much alike. The benefits of inclusion far outweigh any negatives that some may feel exist. We are a small community and we care about our families and their children. We want the best for everyone and we believe strongly that this is accomplished through inclusion.*

4. What is the toughest challenge to make inclusion work? *What is challenging is providing for the needs of each student. We need to acquire enough information to make appropriate educational decisions, as well as successful programming for each child. Often, we second guess ourselves or suffer from 20/20 hind vision. "If we had only", kind of thing. You want to be right more often than not.*
5. Is inclusion good for all your students? *We haven't had a situation where inclusion hasn't proved successful. I'm not the type of person to say that it will work in all circumstances but to this time in my career I haven't experienced that.*
6. How do you get parents to work with you to make inclusion a success? *Like I said previously we are a small community and we care about our neighbours, and their needs. Parents in our community are supportive of inclusion. To be honest that's one of the prime reasons it is successful. Parents of students with exceptional needs are used to advocating for their children and I sense a kind of relief when they realize that we all want the same things for their children.*
7. How do you help teachers manage the challenges of inclusion? *It's a team approach to helping teachers with exceptional children, from the parents to the school and divisional teams, as well as specialists who are brought in under special circumstances. Inclusion will not be successful if a support team is not available.*
8. Can you share an example of how inclusion was successful for a teacher and/or student in your school? *We have had children who have transitioned from the ABA (Applied Behavior Analysis) program to school and the Division's Student Services have arranged not only for meeting but for professional development as well as time to learn more about the ABA approach. This has also extended to the Educational Assistant and the Special needs teacher.*
9. What helped prepare you to be an effective principal of an "inclusive school"? *Personal experience and research have been my two biggest influences. The School Division is firmly behind inclusion so it's not as if we run into any interference.*
10. Do you have a final comment?

It's not as if we are doing anything exceptional. We just try to do the very best we can for all the students in our community.